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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 2031
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE 0121
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA IMMEDIATE 0131
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 0604
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0420
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU IMMEDIATE 0128
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 0287
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RUEHVN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 2426
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000347

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PM ISABEKOV RESIGNS; ATAMBAYEV ASKED TO
FORM NEW CABINET

REF: BISHKEK 343

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On March 28, President Bakiyev reversed Prime Minister Isabekov's decision earlier that day to fire five cabinet ministers. On March 29, Isabekov resigned, and Bakiyev named opposition figure Almaz Atambayev as Acting Prime Minister, with the instruction to form a "coalition cabinet" that would bring some opposition leaders into the current government. Parliament may vote on Atambayev's nomination as early as March 30. Atambayev's appointment follows a recent series of concessions Bakiyev has made to the opposition in an apparent attempt to divide the opposition and peel away support for former Prime Minister Felix Kulov. Kulov's United Front has called for open-ended street protests starting April 11 to demand early presidential elections, and has termed Atambayev a "traitor." For his part, Atambayev has positioned himself as a moderator between the sides, calling for reform, but not for Bakiyev to step down. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that he will be able to broker a compromise that averts the demonstrations. As we've said many times before, the political situation remains unpredictable and highly volatile. END SUMMARY.

Bakiyev Reverses Isabekov

12. (C) Mid-day on March 28, Prime Minister Azim Isabekov announced that he had dismissed five ministers and two agency heads. Isabekov said that he had made the decision to reshuffle the cabinet, and that he would welcome opposition

members in the government (reftel). At a late afternoon cabinet meeting, however, President Bakiyev reversed the decision, said no one would be fired, and asked the ministers to keep working at their jobs. (COMMENT: Under the constitution, the prime minister can solicit the resignation of a minister, but it is up to the president to accept the resignation. We think it implausible that Isabekov would have acted without Bakiyev's instruction. END COMMENT.)

Isabekov Resigns; Atambayev Appointed

13. (U) On March 29, Prime Minister Isabekov offered his resignation, citing the need to keep stability. (Isabekov later told the press that he had been put in a "silly situation," and he would make a fuller statement in a few days.) Bakiyev accepted the resignation and appointed former Trade Minister and opposition leader Almaz Atambayev as Acting Prime Minister. Bakiyev reportedly instructed Atambayev to consult with various political parties and movements and to propose a coalition government that would presumably include other opposition figures.

14. (C) Atambayev, one of the organizers of the November 2006 street demonstrations, has positioned himself as a moderator between Bakiyev and opposition factions, meeting several times with Bakiyev over the past two weeks. He told the Ambassador on March 26 that Bakiyev had offered him the PM post, but that he would only accept on three conditions: Bakiyev must agree to constitutional reform, he must allow the state-run TV to be "public," and he must allow Atambayev to bring other opposition figures into the government. With this latest step, Bakiyev has now satisfied all three of these conditions. Until recently, Atambayev was the co-chair of the opposition For Reforms movement. On March 28,

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Atambayev, along with MPs Beknazarov and Sadyrbayev, former FM Roza Otunbayeva, and Edil Baisalov, split from For Reforms to form "United Kyrgyzstan." They said their agenda was constitutional reform, economic stability, and human rights, working within the legal framework -- an apparent contrast to Felix Kulov's United Front, which is demanding that Bakiyev resign and hold early presidential elections.

Bakiyev Offers Referendum -- But After the SCO Summit

15. (U) In his remarks to the cabinet on March 28, Bakiyev again rejected the United Front's demands for early presidential elections, but he did say he would consider holding a referendum on his presidency. Bakiyev said that he would consider such a step only following the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, currently planned for August in Bishkek. He said that discussing such an action ahead of an event of "historic significance" for Kyrgyzstan would be irresponsible.

Inconsistency Seems the Norm

16. (C) Reversing course on the cabinet firings was not a total surprise, as Bakiyev has previously changed positions on a range of issues -- and no decision appears final. While he initially supported Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief initiative, Bakiyev distanced himself from it and let the cabinet kill it when there was widespread public opposition. Recently, after signing a law banning right-hand drive vehicles, Bakiyev changed his mind days later following a "protest drive" by owners of such vehicles. In November, Bakiyev reached a compromise with the opposition on the terms of a new constitution that strengthened the parliament and restricted some presidential powers; in December, Bakiyev pushed through changes that restored those powers to him. (COMMENT: These increasingly frequent flip-flops and the recent concessions

to the opposition reveal a president unsure of himself, and a government incapable of acting decisively. END COMMENT.)

Comment

17. (C) Isabekov was a long-time crony of Bakiyev, and it is difficult to imagine that he would have initiated the cabinet firings absent Bakiyev's instruction. The way this was handled made Bakiyev and the entire government look ridiculous. Bringing Atambayev into government may be the first step in forming a coalition, and it may bring some of the more moderate elements of the opposition into the cabinet, but there is no guarantee that parliament will approve Atambayev's nomination. The real question remains how Kulov will react, and to what extent Atambayev's appointment will deflate support for the United Front's demand for new presidential elections. Despite overtures from the government (State Secretary Madumarov visited United Front headquarters today), Kulov has said that the United Front will go ahead with the April demonstrations. At this point, as we've said many times before, the political situation remains unsettled.

YOVANOVITCH